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The Wedding Ceremony

584 When a man wants to marry, he pays the girl so much money down. Her price runs from about Rs.70* to Rs.500, according as the man is a commoner or a shaikh. (I am not of course here referring to alliances and customs ruling among the great princely houses of Arabia, such as the Al Sa'ud, Al Khalifah or Al Subah.)†

The man also has to provide the bride with a frock or two (*kiswah*) and a "bed" to lie on (*frásh*), usually consisting of a red cotton quilt (*laháf*) for spreading on the ground. This provision of the marriage-bed by the prospective husband is essential.

585 584 The gift to the bride of money, clothes and marriage-bed is called the *jehâz*, and is a universal custom. The *jehâz*‡ having been presented, the marriage ceremony is carried out by the local *muta'awah*, or man learned in religion. Among shaikhs, etc., this person is usually an *alim* or priest, but among the poorer Badawin the *muta'awah* may be any person who can lead the prayers and has what they call *'ilm* or learning.

In every community, however small, there will always be found some person qualified to solemnise marriage, if only the local blind man.

The marriage ceremony is very simple indeed: the priest merely asks the man if he will take the girl and the bridegroom replies "yes" in front of witnesses. He then asks the girl's representative (her father or brother) if she agrees to have this man for husband, and when the reply "yes" is given, the ceremony is over. Occasionally the bride is seated behind the tent partition, and hears everything that goes on, but this is rare.

The bride has, of course, snatched glimpses of her prospective husband and at least knows what he looks like. Unless the girl is his cousin and has been brought up with him, the bridegroom on the other hand has not as a rule seen his prospective wife. Of course, if he is clever he has ways and means of getting a peep beforehand, and the girl willingly helps him to satisfy his curiosity.

584 According to accepted custom, a man may not propose to an unmarried girl, even if he finds and courts her among the camels. It is

* A rupee is normally equal to 1s. 4d.

† Among the Al Subah the marriage sum is about Rs.1500 to Rs.2000.

‡ See also trousseau at the end of this chapter.

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not done. He must approach her through her father. He can and 584
does, however, propose in person to a widow or a divorced [587]
woman.

After marriage the Badawin takes his bride to the tent he has pre- 585
viously pitched for her, close to that of her father, and consummation takes place. Many are the curious eyes and ears which are concentrated on the bridal tent.

As with us, those chiefly interested in the marriage ceremony are the other women of the camp.

Slaves marrying go through the same ceremonies as the freeborn, [567]
the master and mistress of the slave acting the part of the parents of the bridegroom: and as much interest is evinced in the marriage of one of their slaves as in that of one of the family.

The Badawin's love for cohabitation is well known, and as I have 831
said elsewhere, sex is to him the supreme joy of life. Both bride and bridegroom indulge riotously in this honeymoon period. So wildly passionate is their love-making that I have known of a man breaking two of his wife's ribs on the first night of their marriage. As soon as 842
the wife finds herself with child, she lets the other women know about it, and it becomes the occasion for much rejoicing. She continues cohabiting with her husband as a matter of course till just before the baby's birth.

DIVORCE

Divorce procedure is simplicity itself. The man need only say to 586
his wife before witnesses that he does not want her any more. He has to make the statement *three times* for it to be valid: *Ma arid ich, ma arid ich, ma arid ich.* No disgrace attaches to the woman, who takes the matter quite philosophically, and proceeds to look for another husband.

If the man divorces the woman, she keeps the *jehâz* he has given her, which is sufficient provision for her for a considerable time, or till she gets a second husband. It must not be forgotten that she has nearly always invested her *jehâz* in buying a camel or some sheep and has thus become an owner of livestock.

The point to emphasise is that no disgrace whatsoever clings to 587
divorce, and if the girl is fair, or was the wife of a big shaikh, there is

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B 586 husband, she usually tells him so and asks for a divorce. If the husband has any decency (*shlma*), he will grant her request, provided the other man repays him his *jehâz*, i.e. money he has spent on his wife. This rule does not apply to a first-cousin wife, *bint 'ám*.

k 585 B 585 In Kuwait town they have the pretty custom that a bridegroom must, when he gets married, spend seven days with his wife in her parents' house. This applies also to the Kuwait tribes proper. The idea is to make things easy for the wife, who usually is filled with shame and nervousness. Among the Kuwait 'Arabdar or local tribesmen, a marriage is arranged and settled as follows:

k 584 B 584 "A" wants to marry. He expresses his desire to his womenfolk, who look round and suggest a likely bride in such and such a tent. "A" then sends them over to see the girl's mother, and to discuss the matter. If the mother is willing, she sends the women off to the girl's father, and to him they propound the idea also. The father then says what he is willing to accept as his daughter's *jehâz* and the money is paid over. Haggling does not take place in such matters, for if "A"'s deputies do not agree to the amount of the *jehâz* they simply say "nothing doing", and go back to their tent.

k 585 B 585 Things having been settled and the prospective bridegroom informed, "A" sends for a *muta'awah* (priest) and also summons the girl's father. The marriage is then solemnised, the father of the girl being her proxy. The priest gets Rs.2 as his fee.

Up to this time the girl quite possibly, in fact usually, knows nothing of what is going on or being arranged for her. The first news she gets is from her mother, who tells her to prepare for the marriage-bed that night. Great excitement ensues and often much reluctance. When the girl is ready and everything properly arranged, usually by the same evening, the bridegroom is escorted to the bride's tent, or more usually to a small tent set apart near that of the parents. He is made to sit down and receive his men friends for about an hour. When they have all gone, his own women relatives and those of the bride bring the girl to the tent, clustering round her to prevent her escaping, as she must pretend to want to do. Having put her into the tent, whose sides (*rwag*) are all closed, they shout out to "A" to seize and take possession of the girl of his choice, and then discreetly retire. The girl usually attempts to bolt after the women, or get out by

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K 585 creeping under the flap of the tent. The man literally has to seize her and hold her fast unless he wants to lose her. Slowly but surely he B 585 then woos her, and makes her take off her *'abba* and show her face and hair, etc. (*kasshafa wa yajbarha*).

The next morning when he gets up to go from her, he has to leave a present of money equal to one-tenth the value of the *jehaz*, under his bride's mattress. Thus if he has paid Rs.300 for his wife, he leaves Rs.30 under her mattress. The custom is universal, and the gift so made is known as *al subdha* (or the "morning gift").

When a shaikh or big man wants to marry a lowly maiden, it is not customary for her father to name his daughter's price. This is left to the chivalry of the shaikh, who is supposed to know what to give, and to add a little more. He gives not only money but must send the *kiswah* as well, i.e. marriage bed, rugs, mattress, new frocks and undergarments, etc., according to his means.

The husband's entering the wife's presence preparatory to consummation of marriage is known as *al midkhal*, or the "entering in".

B 585 Among non-Kuwait tribes the bride is always brought to the bridegroom's tent. This is the same in the towns of inner Najd. Some tribes, notably the Dhafir, go in for a great deal of horseplay, and try by means of coarse pranks and tricks to embarrass the bride and bridegroom. They surround the bridal tent and peep inside in a most embarrassing manner, and as often as not try and throw water over them through the tent curtains. Among the 'Awazim, the girl is not brought to the man nor the man to the tent of the girl's parents; all he is told is that he must go and find and capture his bride, who is hiding among the women. The search and chase then begins, and woe betide the man who cannot catch his lady.

K 585 In Kuwait town a curious custom exists among the common people. If a female child passes a little blood after birth, the event is carefully remembered by her mother, and when the day arrives that her daughter (now grown up) is to be married, the mother informs the relatives and the ceremony called *natdra* or "watching" is gone through. The bride's female relatives surround the bride and bridegroom in the bride chamber from *sundown till dawn*, and by music, dancing, laughter, etc., prevent consummation of marriage. At about midnight they place the bridegroom's bare foot against the bride's, and then pour water

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837 684 Again, as in the desert, immorality is practically unknown among unmarried girls. Married women on the contrary often indulge in clandestine intrigue. The penalty for immorality is death to the woman if she is found out. The woman's brothers and cousins always appear more concerned about their sister's honour than the father is, and if vengeance is to be carried out it is usually the brothers and cousins who track the woman down. As excuse they plead that they could not hold their heads up in tribal *majlis* if they had a sister living in dishonour. Marriage with the man who has led her astray is the only method that will save the girl's life. Even then the seducer must pay *hashm* or honour-money to satisfy the girl's relatives. A strange man sometimes takes the place of the seducer and can get the girl off punishment by marrying her, but this is not common. *Fasl* or *'idiyah* is the term given to blood money. Among the Iraq *Ma'adán* (marsh) tribes a girl-relative of a murderer is nearly always given to the brother or son of the murdered person, the idea being that a child from the union of two enemy houses allays any hatred that might remain.

585 Among the Arab tribes of Iraq, as opposed to the *Ma'adán* (marshmen), a man sets up a special tent or mat shelter called a *haufa* for his wife to be taken to immediately after marriage. This is close to his house or tent as the case may be, and corresponds to a honeymoon tent. After the bride is taken to this *haufa* by her women, the husband, arrayed in his best garments, is conveyed there by his men friends and consummates the marriage. The woman remains a prisoner in the *haufa* for seven days. The man, on the contrary, may come out and receive visitors in his *mudhif* or nearby guest-tent. On the eighth day the woman comes out of her *haufa*, goes into her new home and takes charge of the household duties. The custom of setting up the *haufa* tent applies only if the girl has never been married before. If she be a widow she goes straight to her husband's tent.

LOVE

831 595 I have often been asked if love, as we know it, exists among the Badawin. I have unhesitatingly replied that it does. The fact that a man is permitted to take more than a single wife has nothing to do with the matter. Indeed, it is rare to see a Badawin with more than

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The Virgin Bride

Chap. XIII

Seven days before her marriage the unmarried girl is taken in hand by a special woman who is told off to wash her, clean her, attend to her hair, garments, anointing and the like. This friend's principal duty is to remove all superfluous hair from the prospective bride before the wedding night.

When the husband "goes in into his wife" (*yudkhul 'alaiha*) it is considered good form among the Badawin for the young girl to struggle with her husband and try and save her virginity. She screams and cries out and fights him, sometimes for several hours. It is also considered quite the thing and not indelicate, for the female relations to listen to such struggles and screams from outside the tent (or door, in the case of townsfolk). In Basra and other big towns this custom has gone out of fashion, but it is practically universal elsewhere.

Among the middle and poor classes in Kuwait so great is the pride felt by a young wife in having preserved her virginity till the day of her marriage, that it is the custom for the husband after cohabitation to take out the bedsheet to the bride's male and female relations, and display it to them, calling out in pride and pleasure *hayak Allah wajhkum, kafakhu bintkum tammam* or "God whiten your faces, you have indeed kept your daughter pure".

If a young wife should have already lost her virginity, whether innocently and naturally, or by artificial means, there is great trouble for her at marriage. It means that she can show no blood-stained sheet. Her husband is filled with deep suspicion and jealousy and may hand her back to her parents, saying "I do not want your daughter, she is no virgin. Look at the white sheet". This rather gruesome test of a girl's innocence leads, of course, to many subterfuges, such as her cutting herself, or smearing a little chicken's blood on the sheet to satisfy the husband. The danger of such a trick is obvious, however, as husbands are on the look out. An unfortunate girl who fails to pass the test is often taken away and killed by her male relatives to vindicate the honour of the family. Sometimes a young husband who has decent feelings and a good heart will himself save his bride even though he has been deceived, and will devise some stratagem. This is especially the case when the girl pleads the law of *dakhla*: *Dakhlat kafakhi ya folan*. I have known personally of one such case, the man